

**Transpersonal Gratitude, Emotional Intelligence, Life Contentment, and
Mental Health Risk among Adolescents and Young Adults**

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(CONCEPTUAL PAPER)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Mental or psychological health is as important as the physiological one. Statistics demonstrate that because of immense increase in mental health issues the problems like substance use (Ritchie & Roser, 2019; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMSHA], 2019; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2019), suicide (Armstrong, 2019), depression (Ritchie & Roser, 2018), anxiety (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015), and stress (Ritchie & Roser, 2018) are also increasing. These problems could lead to fatal consequences and even death as indicated by worldwide statistics (Armstrong, 2019; Ritchie & Roser, 2018, 2019; UNODC, 2019).

The mental issues have a direct impact on physiological health as well thus adding to the sufferings (Hengartner, Read, & Moncrieff, 2019; Ohrnberger, Fichera, & Sutton, 2017; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019). There also exist an apprehension that death rate due to mental health concerns may surpass that due to physiological health concern in the near future (Carroll, 2018; Insel, 2011; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2014). It is thus a dire need to address the issue.

Worldwide statistics also reveal that the major proportion of the sufferers for mental issues comprised of adolescents and young adults (Jurewicz, 2015; UNODC, 2018). The reason for which could be the obvious depression, anxiety, stress observed by the both at-risk populations due to the challenges of transition from one age group to the next one (Collins & Munoz-Solomando, 2018; Nebhinani & Jain, 2019). The major challenges for adolescents constitute of bodily changes (i.e., development of secondary sex characteristics) (Kar, Choudhury, & Singh, 2015; McAteer et al., 2017; Pringle et al., 2016), peer group pressure

(Moldes, Biton, Gonzaga, & Moneva, 2019; Singh, 2017; Tripathy, 2018), behavioral and emotional disturbances (Borba & Marin, 2018; Osman, Khalaf, Omar, & Ismail, 2019; Williams, Scott, & Aarons, 2018). The young adults, on the other hand, face challenges of transition from adolescent to adulthood (Fegert, Hauth, Banaschewski, & Freyberger, 2016; Switek & Easterlin, 2018), financial pressure (Dewilde, Hubers, & Coulter, 2018; Lennartz, Arundel, & Ronald, 2016; Stein et al., 2013), conflict at the stage of isolation vs. intimacy (Mackinnon, De Pasquale, & Pratt, 2016), personal development (Bonnie et al., 2015), and change in outlook towards life (Switek & Easterlin, 2018).

Many protective factors could play role to prevent the state of mental risk that might be imposed by the challenges as mentioned above. The most significant of which is biology; stating that some biological factors make an individual prone to mental health issues (Wasserman & Wasserman, 2016; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). The next come the environmental factors which constitute of both society and situation. These factors are social support (Harandi et al., 2017), financial stability (Brackertz et al., 2020; Shippee et al., 2019), and sense of security (Daneshnejad & Matin, 2016). Psychological factors like resilience (Gloria & Steinhardt, 2016; Rutten et al., 2013), self-reflection (Philippi & Koenigs, 2014), personal growth (Gamme & Eriksson, 2018; Lauveng et al., 2016), self-regulation (Calam & Bee, 2018; Woodward et al., 2017), and optimism (Fatima et al., 2019; Yuan & Wang, 2016). All these factors act in an integrative manner to prevent development of a mental issue.

The present research proposal, however, proposed to study effect of transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment on mental health risk. Mental health risk will be assessed in terms of level of depression, anxiety, and stress because these three mental health issues forms the fundamental constituent for a major proportion of prevailing mental health issues (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) like major depressive disorder

(Belleau et al., 2019; Richter-Levin & Xu, 2018; Xin et al., 2015), mood and anxiety disorders (Lee et al., 2019; Syed & Nameroff, 2017), and substance use disorder (Carey, 2018; McHugh et al., 2020). The assessment for mental health risk in proposed study would be such that higher the degree of depression, anxiety, and stress higher will be the mental health risk. The study variables, which are proposed to protect individual's mental health, are briefly introduced in the following paragraphs.

Personal gratitude is the person's sense of being thankful to the world or specific individuals who have either assisted or provided ease to that person (Mercon-Vargas et al., 2018; Tudge & Freitas, 2018). Transpersonal gratitude, on contrast, referred to the gratitude that extended beyond the personal gratitude (Artinian, 2019; Elfers & Hlava, 2016). It comprised of four major domains; expression of gratitude (i.e., recognition that someone has benefit you by going out of their way motivates to express gratitude towards them), value of gratitude (i.e., expression of gratitude enhances interpersonal relationships), transcendent gratitude (i.e., feeling a benefit outside of oneself such as blessings and opportunities), and spiritual connection (i.e., attribution of benefit as coming from divine which result to experience sense of connection to divine presence) (Hlava, Elfers, & Offringa, 2014).

Literature demonstrates that high degree of transpersonal gratitude could help prevent the depression, anxiety, and stress (Allen, 2018; Becker, 2015; Chowdhury, 2020; Hlafa & Elfers, 2014). Also, it has been found that emotional intelligence; the ability to understand and manage one's emotions and of others around us (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al., 1998), is associated with transpersonal gratitude such that higher the gratitude higher the emotional intelligence (Geng, 2018). The higher emotional intelligence leads to decrease depression, anxiety, and stress (Davis & Humphray, 2012; Kim et al., 2017; Kousha et al., 2018; Tannous & Matar, 2010). The third variable of study interest is life contentment. It is termed as the

emotional and mental state of satisfaction with the life situations a person is experiencing (Lavallee et al., 2007). Life contentment also found in literature to be associated negatively with depression, anxiety, and stress (Ghazwin et al., 2016; Guney et al., 2010; Nes et al., 2013). It has a positive relationship with transpersonal gratitude which is found to foster life contentment and also act as the precursor of it (Salvador-Ferrer, 2017; Unanue et al., 2019).

Significance

Concluding the above discussion, mental health risk is increasing round the globe (UNODC, 2019). The ratio of risk is higher among adolescents and young adults (UNODC, 2018) mainly because of the transition challenges both age groups are to face (Nebhinani & Jain, 2019). This elevated mental health risk also forms the basis of other issues like substance use and suicide (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). The mental health risk could be assessed through level of depression, anxiety, and stress as these three forms the fundamentals of mental health problems, which is evident from the literature aforementioned (APA, 2013; Lee et al., 2019; McHugh et al., 2020). The literature support also demonstrates that the factors like transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment could help reduce depression, anxiety, and stress (Chowdhury, 2020; Ghazwin et al., 2016; Kousha et al., 2018). Also, there exist an evidence of gratitude contributing in development of emotional intelligence and life contentment (Geng, 2018; Unanue et al., 2019). The current proposed study thus conceptualizes transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment as protective factors against mental health risk; such that emotional intelligence and life contentment act as serial mediators for the relationship of transpersonal gratitude and mental health risk. The findings of the study could help evaluate the significance of proposed variables in reducing mental health issues which would assist to generate an intervention plan for reduction of mental health risk among adolescents and young adults.

Objectives

1. To determine the construct validity and psychometric properties of the research instruments.
2. To compare the data scores on variables among adolescents and young adults.
3. To compare the data scores on variables across gender; males and females.
4. To see the relationship between transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, life contentment, and mental health risk among adolescents and young adults.
5. To investigate the mediating role of emotional intelligence and life contentment for the relationship between transpersonal gratitude and mental health risk among adolescents and young adults.
6. To study the role of demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, birth order, education, marital status, employment status, monthly income) related differences on the variables among adolescents and young adults.

Hypotheses

1. Transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment is higher among young adults.
2. Depression, anxiety, and stress is higher among adolescents.
3. Transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment positively correlate with each other and negatively with depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents and young adults.
4. Transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, and life contentment are negative predictors of depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents and young adults.

5. Emotional intelligence and life contentment act as serial mediators for the relationship of transpersonal gratitude with depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents and young adults.
6. Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship of transpersonal gratitude with depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents and young adults.
7. Life contentment mediates the relationship of transpersonal gratitude with depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents and young adults.
8. Females have higher degree of depression, anxiety, and stress than males.
9. First and last-born score higher on depression, anxiety, and stress than middle-born.
10. Married individuals have less level of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Proposed Research Instruments

The Transpersonal Gratitude Scale (TGS). The scale was developed by Hlava, Elfers, and Offringa (2014) for evaluating transpersonal context of gratitude. It comprised of 16 items and four subscales; expression of gratitude, value of gratitude, transcendent gratitude, and spiritual connection with four items each. It is a 6-point Likert type scale. The response options comprised of 1 for *strongly disagree*, 2 for *disagree*, 3 for *slightly disagree*, 4 for *slightly agree*, 5 for *agree*, and 6 for *strongly agree*. Item-7 is reverse coded. The score ranges from 16-96. The high score on the scale demonstrate high level of transpersonal gratitude. The Cronbach's alpha value of .88 indicates that the overall scale and its subscales possess good internal consistency.

Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). It is developed by Schutte et al. (1998) to measure emotional intelligence. It is a 33-item scale with 5 response options; such that, 1 denotes *strongly disagree*, 2 denotes *disagree*, 3 denotes *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 denotes *agree*, and 5 denotes *strongly agree*. Item-5, 28, and 33 are reverse coded.

The total score for the scale ranges from 33-165. The high score on the scale demonstrate high level of emotional intelligence. The Cronbach's alpha value of .90 indicates that the overall scale and its subscales possess good internal consistency.

Contentment with Life Assessment Scale (CLAS).The scale was developed by Lavallee et al. (2007) for the assessment of life contentment. It comprised of 5 items that are to be responded on a 7-point Likert type scale. The response options comprised of 1 for *strongly disagree*, 2 for *disagree*, 3 for *slightly disagree*, 4 for *neutral*, 5 for *slightly agree*, 6 for *agree*, and 7 for *strongly agree*. Item-3 and 4 are reverse coded. The score ranges from 5-35. The high score on the scale demonstrate high level of life contentment. The Cronbach's alpha value of .87 indicates that the scale possesses good internal consistency.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21).The scale is developed Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The scale comprised of 21 items with three subscales; depression, anxiety, and stress each having seven items. DASS-21 has four response options; 0 for *did not apply to me at all*, 1 for *applied to me to some degree, or some of the time*, 2 for *applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time*, and 3 for *applied to me very much or most of the time*. The final score is obtained by multiplying the scores by 2.

Subscale of depression assesses presence of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest or involvement, anhedonia and inertia. The score of 0-9 indicates normal level, 10-13 indicates mild, 14-20 indicates moderate, 21-27 indicates severe, and score of 28 and above indicates extremely severe level of depression. The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The score of 0-7 indicates normal level, 8-9 indicates mild, 10-14 indicates moderate, 15-19 indicates severe, and score of 20 and above indicates extremely severe level of anxiety. The stress scale is sensitive to levels of chronic nonspecific arousal. It

assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset or agitated, irritable or over-reactive and impatient. The score of 0-14 indicates normal level, 15-18 indicates mild, 19-25 indicates moderate, 26-33 indicates severe, and score of 34 and above indicates extremely severe level of stress.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Proposed Research Design

The study will be correlational in nature aiming to understand the relationship between study variables; transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, life contentment, and mental health risk. The whole study will be comprised of two phases. Phase-I will determine the construct validity and psychometric properties of study instruments. Phase-II will study the relationship of study variables. The construct validity of research instruments is essential to ensure the validity of factor structure before heading towards the main study (Haig, 2010; Prudon, 2015).

Proposed Model

The reviewed literature helped to design the model for the proposed study as shown in the following:

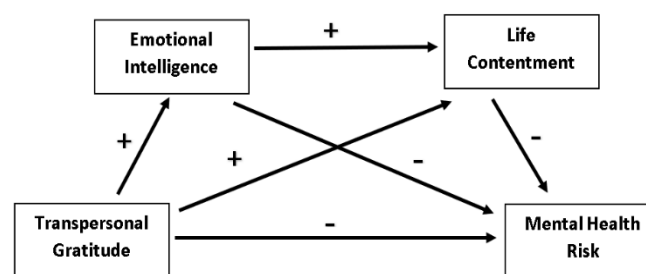


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of the study showing relationship of transpersonal gratitude, emotional intelligence, life contentment, and mental health risk

Proposed Sample

The sample for the study will comprise of adolescents and young adults ($N=500$) with equal proportion of males and females. The inclusion criterion for adolescents is teenager up to 17 years old and for young adult the participants must be of age 18-25 years old.

Proposed Analysis

The descriptive analyses would be carried to determine coefficient of reliability, mean, standard deviation, and skewness of data set. The hypotheses of the study will be tested by using inferential analyses like correlation, regression, mediation, and model testing.

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